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## **Introduction**

The La Plata municipal government has enjoyed a long history of effective planning. The elected body, the Mayor and Council, and the appointed planning body, the Planning Commission (“Commission”), have taken the planning process very seriously. Comprehensive Plans have not just been written and adopted only to be ignored. Instead, they have been used as the tool for setting priorities and measuring success.

Article 66B was added to the *Maryland Annotated Code* in 1927. It delegated basic land use regulatory powers to Maryland's municipalities. Article 66B authorized municipal corporations to make, adopt, extend, add to and execute a plan. Such plans are to serve as a guide to public and private actions and decisions to ensure the development of public and private property in appropriate relationships and shall include any areas outside of the corporate limits which, in the opinion of the Commission, bear planning responsibilities of the Commission.

In 1996 the Planning Commission completed its work on the Comprehensive Plan and forwarded it to the Mayor and Council for public comment and adoption. In 1996 that Plan was adopted by the Mayor and Council. Since 1996 the Plan has been consulted on countless occasions. Recommendations have been implemented and recommended capital improvement projects have been completed.

*Please note that when the "Plan" is referred to, it means this current update of the Comprehensive Plan. Referring to the Town with a capital "T" refers to the municipal government of La Plata. When the town is referred to with a small "t", it is the geographical location and the municipality itself.*

## **Future Action**

On April 28, 2002, a sizable portion of the Town was damaged or destroyed by an F4 category tornado. The area of damage within the Town begins at the Town's western boundary along Port Tobacco Road (Maryland Route 6), travels east across Crain Highway (U.S. Route 301) and continues in a path through the Town's eastern boundary in the Clarks Run Subdivision community. The path of the tornado included areas on streets leading off of Charles Street. Residential and business structures were damaged or destroyed. It is estimated that seventy percent (70%) of businesses located within the Town's Central Business District and Commercial Highway District were damaged or destroyed.

With the support of the community, the Town is already moving forward with the rebuilding process and is committed to making La Plata a better place to live. The storm's impact on the structures in Town, in particular the business districts, has been enormous. It is recommended that at a later date the Town revisit sections of this Comprehensive Plan that impact those areas affected by the storm. One of the primary reasons for this is to ensure the policies established in the Town's Comprehensive Plan are not hindering the redevelopment and revitalization of these areas, and that established priorities are still valid.

## **Vision Plan for Greater La Plata**

In March of 2000, the Mayor and Council adopted the Vision Plan for Greater La Plata (the “Vision Plan”). The visioning process began as a result of the emergence of several major concerns among the citizens and officials of the Town. These included the traffic congestion, utility capabilities, the future of Route 301 in relation to maintaining and revitalizing the historic downtown area, and the character and quality of future residential growth.

Visioning team members, comprised of citizens, business leaders, as well as state and local representatives, met four times throughout the summer and fall of 1999. The objective of the visioning effort was to allow key “stakeholders” of the community to define the preferred future for the Town and the surrounding greater La Plata area, and to identify the key initial steps that need to be taken to achieve that preferred future. A Technical Advisory Group was established, and working with the Town’s Vision Plan consulting team, created the Vision Plan for Greater La Plata. The Vision Plan sets forth the preferred future for the Town and its surrounding lands, and provides the framework for a series of immediate as well as long term actions by the Town, County, State and private sector, to achieve this vision.

## **The Plan for the Future of Downtown La Plata**

The Vision Plan included several recommendations for immediate action, one of the most important of which was a detailed design for the downtown area. The creation of the “Plan for the Future of Downtown La Plata” was the first step in implementing the Vision Plan.

The plan for the new downtown was prepared during the fall and winter of 2000-2001 by a Citizen Task Force, working with the consulting team. The plan provides a conceptual layout for the physical development of the downtown. It is more detailed than the general concept plan created for the downtown during the Vision Plan process, but still general enough in nature to allow flexibility that will be needed to achieve the plan during the next decade. To appreciate the concepts envisioned for the downtown area, it is highly recommended that the reader of this Plan review the Plan for the Future of Downtown La Plata.

## **2001 Comprehensive Plan Update**

The 1997 Smart Growth Act mandates that all Counties and Municipalities update their Comprehensive Plan at a minimum, every six years. This updating process can be a detailed public process or can be as simple as having the Plan reviewed by staff and writing a letter indicating that no changes are needed. The 2001 Comprehensive Plan reflects a thorough review of the 1996 Plan and provides for significant updates and changes to that Plan. Statistics, where feasible, have been updated, project status lists have been updated or added to, as well as issues raised during the visioning process.

The Comprehensive Plan serves as the Town’s guide in determining land use oriented

decisions. The 2001 Comprehensive Plan supports the Town's visioning efforts by incorporating key components of the Town's Vision Plan and the Plan for the Future of Downtown La Plata.

The Plan is to contain, at a minimum, the following elements. First, a statement of goals and objectives, principals, policies, and standards which shall serve as a guide for the development of La Plata. Second, the plan shall include a land use element, which designates the most appropriate land use, be it residential, commercial or public. Third, a transportation element shall be included, which includes transportation options. A community facilities plan is the fourth required element in the plan. Community facilities include parks, schools, medical facilities and public buildings.

### **Eight Visions**

The Town continues to support the Visions contained in the Economic Development, Resource Protection and Planning Act of 1992. The 2000 General Assembly added an eighth vision to Article 66B which the Town has incorporated into the 2001 Comprehensive Plan. Article 66B now contains eight visions, including a new seventh vision. The previous seventh vision is now incorporated as the eighth vision. This Comprehensive Plan will discuss each of these visions and how each impacts La Plata.

**The first vision** is that development is concentrated in suitable areas. This Plan will address this vision in the Land Use Element and in the Sensitive Areas Element. There are streams, steep slopes and a floodplain in La Plata, and methods will need to be used to direct development away from these areas.

**The second vision** is that sensitive areas are protected. Sensitive areas include streams and their buffers, floodplains, steep slopes and habitat for threatened or endangered species. Upon checking with the Heritage Program with the Department of Natural Resources, it was determined that La Plata does not have any known habitat for threatened or endangered species, but does have all other types of sensitive areas located within the corporate limits. The Sensitive Areas Element will address this vision.

**The third vision** is that in rural areas growth is directed to existing population centers and resource areas are protected. La Plata is an existing population center and is so recognized in the Charles County Comprehensive Plan. The La Plata Planning Commission has long had the opinion that growth should be directed to the towns and population centers within the county. Public and private services can be provided more efficiently in these centers and there is less stress on the environment if growth is concentrated rather than allowed to sprawl into the rural areas. By definition, La Plata is a population center; therefore, this Plan will not specifically address this vision except to support the wisdom of the vision.

**The fourth vision** is that stewardship of the Chesapeake Bay and the land is a universal ethic. La Plata lies within the watersheds of both the Port Tobacco River and the Wicomico River. In addition, the Town operates a wastewater treatment facility which empties its treated effluent into the Port Tobacco River. It is clear that the Town and its residents have a responsibility to protect

the Bay. We will address this vision in the Sensitive Areas Element and in the Community Facilities Plan.

**The fifth vision** is that conservation of resources, including reduction in resource consumption, is practiced. We will address this vision in the Physical Inventories section and in the Community Facilities Plan. The resource that the Town has been most concerned about over the years is drinking water. The availability and wise use of this resource will have to be a priority in the next decade.

**The sixth vision** is that economic growth is encouraged and that regulatory mechanisms are streamlined. The Plan will address this vision in both the Community and Economic Development Element and the Review and Regulation Element.

**The new seventh vision** has been added to ensure that adequate public facilities and infrastructure under the control of the County or Municipal Corporation are available or planned in areas where growth is to occur. The Town continues to ensure that adequate facilities are available prior to development occurring in all areas of the Town.

**The eighth vision** is that funding mechanisms are addressed to achieve these visions. Fiscal resources are always limited; however, the Town will pursue all funding possibilities to implement the visions of the 1992 Planning Act and the 1997 Smart Growth Act. The Town enjoys good working relationships with many State agencies, and the Town takes advantage of Smart Growth grants and loan programs offered by those agencies.

### **Annexations**

The Town has grown in land area since the adoption of the 1996 Comprehensive Plan. Since the last adoption, the Mayor and Council approved the following annexations:

- \* The Stagecoach Crossing annexation, south and west of the former town limits, for the purpose of residential development.
- \* The Charlotte L. Winters annexation, on Oak Avenue, for the purpose of connecting to the Town water system.
- \* The Royal Charter annexation, south and east of the former town limits, for the purpose of residential development and the extension of the King's Grant Subdivision.
- \* The Grace Lutheran Church annexation, for the purpose of expanding the church and its school.
- \* The Charles County Government annexation, east of the former town limits, for the immediate purpose of building a training facility for the College of Southern

Maryland.

## **1.0 GOALS, OBJECTIVES, PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS**

Plan goals and objectives focus on what La Plata could be in the future. Such an effort identifies what existing characteristics are positive and should be preserved, and what deficiencies must be addressed.

The goal that seems to reflect the broadest amount of input from Commission members and citizens is that La Plata must maintain its small town atmosphere. The town is rich in history and architecture which help create the town's identity. In an age where growth and development will be inevitable, La Plata cannot lose its small town identity. New residents seek a hometown; older residents do not want to lose the town that they love.

The Town recognizes that opportunities must be provided for all residents, with their wide range of tastes, ages and income levels. A goal of the Town is to help those who wish to remain in the community to establish roots.

La Plata's vision is to have the town become the choice place to live, work, and play. People will be drawn to La Plata for its niche retail, variety of restaurants, entertainment and pleasant surroundings. They will experience a small town the way it should be.

Efficiency and economy in providing government services and facilities is another important Town goal. This goal includes development of efficient transportation, the wise use of land resources, and the timely extension of water and sewer facilities. Congestion, environmental degradation and ill-advised service extensions do not contribute to the Town's best interests.

As a result of the Visioning process conducted in 1999, the following additional goals are included in the 2001 Comprehensive Plan.

### **Downtown Enrichment**

Make downtown La Plata pedestrian-friendly;

Enhance the downtown core with business services, small shops, a park-like environment, trees, clean streets, sidewalks, and other features that make it pleasing and vibrant;

Create a Town Center area with recreation, shops, and cultural and social opportunities;

Establish central parking, both private and public.

### **La Plata Parkway**

Rosewick/Route 6 connector (short term);

Expansion of the transportation grid system;

Reroute the principal thoroughfares from the town's core, in accord with the long term transportation network of the Vision Plan;

Build a La Plata Parkway that will carry through traffic on Route 301 around La Plata.

### **Mass transit**

Acquire and build the necessary infrastructure to provide mass transportation service to La Plata area residents and businesses, including the provision of train stations, bus stops, park and ride lots, etc.

### **Parks and recreation, civic enhancement and open space**

Upgrade the park system by improving existing parks and creating new ones;

Create a system of bicycle routes and sidewalks throughout town;

Establish sidewalks and street lighting on all Town streets;

Create a cultural arts center/recreation center, including activities for all age groups;

Establish an environmentally friendly system of open space for public use.

### **Industrial/commercial development**

Enhance Route 301 as a business boulevard and integrate with central business district;

Enhance high quality employment opportunities by encouraging high tech and light manufacturing industries to locate in the La Plata area.

### **Building and Architecture**

Enhance the quality of development through architectural and landscaping controls;

Preserve and enhance unique buildings and institutions, such as county buildings, courthouse and library.

### **Neighborhood Enhancement**

Encourage unique neighborhood design concepts, featuring pedestrian access, safety, comfort, sense of belonging, recreation areas, and unique construction and design;

Preserve existing neighborhoods.

### **Educational Opportunities**

Collaborate with the Charles County Board of Education, College of Southern Maryland, and the various private schools, to enhance educational opportunities for La Plata residents.

## **2.0 ELEMENTS**

The broad goals of preserving La Plata's small town character, providing opportunities for all La Plata citizens, providing needed amenities, delivering public services and providing for public infrastructure are further refined in the Plan elements. At the end of the Plan there are implementation steps defined from each element.

### **2.1 Sensitive Areas Element**

#### **2.1A Sensitive Areas Background Information**

The Economic Development, Resource Protection and Planning Act of 1992 required that a Sensitive Areas Element be included in each local plan. Sensitive Areas are areas such as floodplains, steep slopes, streams and their buffers, and habitat of threatened and endangered species. These areas are environmentally sensitive and need special protection.

The Town of La Plata has inventoried the sensitive areas within the town. Of the four types of areas required for protection under the 1992 Planning Act, the town contains streams and buffers, 100-year floodplains, and steep slopes. The Natural Heritage Program at DNR has indicated that there are no habitats of threatened or endangered species within the town.

Simply stated, the Town's goal is to protect and enhance, as is best practicable, the sensitive areas in and around La Plata. The Town desires to protect water quality and important habitat from the adverse impacts of development in order to fulfill its role in improving the environmental quality of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries and to provide for future sources of potable water in order to promote La Plata as a sustainable growth center for Charles County and the region. Objectives and action steps are listed below.

#### **2.1B Sensitive Areas Objectives and Policies**

Sensitive Areas objectives include ensuring that the type and intensity of development is appropriate to the natural capabilities of the land on which the development takes place. Development should be outside of the sensitive areas. Policies include:

- 1) Restrict development in sensitive areas. Direct growth away from such areas.
- 2) Prohibit extensive alteration to major drainage courses.
- 3) Protect vegetation in and around steep slopes, floodplains, and stream buffers. Prioritize these areas for preservation when open space dedication is required as part of the subdivision or development process.

- 4) Prohibit development where sewage treatment will not be a part of the central collection and treatment system operated by the Town.
- 5) Encourage the linking and connection of forest required for preservation so that contiguous wildlife habitat can be created.
- 6) Establish minimum setbacks for development, in the form of natural buffers.
- 7) Encourage urban best management practices (BMP's), such as stormwater ponds, porous paving, grease traps, periodic street cleaning, grassed drainage swales, and tree planting within development projects.
- 8) Require urban BMP's for development projects having reasonable potential to adversely affect the headwaters of the Zekiah Swamp, other important stream valleys, and surface water impoundment areas.
- 9) Within the town, both public and private sector development projects shall be sited and designed to minimize adverse impacts on sensitive areas.
- 10) An environmental stewardship ethic shall be promoted in the public and private sectors through workshops, education and outreach, and volunteer programs.
- 11) Development regulations shall be innovative so as to facilitate development and economic growth while affording protection to sensitive areas.
- 12) If new land is annexed to the town, the Town shall coordinate with the Natural Heritage Program to determine the existence of important habitats, or shall require applicants to investigate the issue.
- 13) Natural buffers for stream, slope and floodplain systems shall be a preferred protection technique over engineering solutions. Exceptions may be made where planned density or land use type cannot otherwise be achieved; on-site or off-site mitigation may be required.

### **2.1C Sensitive Areas Standards and Implementation**

Action steps for the implementation of the policies of the Sensitive Areas Element include assuring that the Town Code includes regulations to require the following:

- 1) Develop flexible development standards that will offer flexibility to the developer, which will at the same time protect the public interest and sensitive areas.

- 2) Coordinate the requirements of regulation for sensitive areas with the Forest Conservation requirements to encourage the conservation and creation of contiguous wildlife habitat.
- 3) Develop clustering standards for residential development projects in the R-10, R-8 and R-5 Districts.
- 4) Natural buffers shall extend at least 100 feet landward, except where currently developed, from the top of the normal banks of the headwaters of the Zekiah Swamp; all other stream buffers shall extend 50 feet landward of streams. Buffers along intermittent streams shall be encouraged where feasible.
- 5) A natural buffer of at least 100 feet shall encompass surface water impoundment areas.
- 6) Steep slopes shall include areas of at least 5,000 square feet which have 15 percent or greater slope.
- 7) The protection of the 100-year floodplain shall be complemented through the Town's flood management program in Chapter 108 of the Code of Ordinances.
- 8) The first half-inch of stormwater runoff shall be treated in detention or retention ponds.

## **2.2 Community and Economic Development Element**

### **2.2A Community and Economic Development Background Information**

The residents of La Plata enjoy a good quality of life as compared to other regions of the State. The Town Government wishes to preserve and enhance that quality of life by supporting employment opportunities for residents of all training and educational backgrounds, by preserving La Plata's small town atmosphere and by encouraging a sense of community and community identity.

The employment center of the town is the Central Business District (CB) and its two adjoining Public Lands Districts. The Charles County government, the courts and their related offices, and the Civista Medical Center provide most of the employment opportunities within the town. These entities also support additional businesses and professions, primarily legal and medical. In addition, most of these jobs provide income levels which support a good quality of life.

The Commercial Highway District (CH) has been the fastest growing commercial district in La Plata since the adoption of the 1996 Comprehensive Plan. The construction of a WalMart and the continued development of the La Plata Village Shopping Center are the most notable projects in the CH District.

### **2.2B Community and Economic Development General Objectives and Policies**

Economic objectives include ensuring that the location, type, and intensity of future development allow for the efficient extension of public services, and that such development does not exceed the physical and financial capability of the Town to provide the full range of facilities to all residents. Other objectives include creating a framework where new and old residents feel that they are part of a vibrant community.

Central Business District objectives include maintaining the district's function as the focal point of the community and as a safe and convenient place to do business.

The Commercial Highway District is home of important La Plata businesses whose nature and needs are slightly different because they are located on Crain Highway. Since the automobile is the primary transportation method in this district, traffic, congestion, visibility, and different signage needs are all issues that need to be examined. It is the objective of the Town to assist businesses within the Crain Highway corridor to be successful and profitable, while at the same time improving the curb appeal of those businesses and the district as a whole, minimizing the adverse impacts of automobile congestion.

La Plata has many desirable characteristics that make it an ideal location for industry. However, in efforts to attract potential employers, La Plata is in competition with sites all over the

region and, arguably, the world. Such employers are concerned with available work force, transportation, utility rates and taxes, and the availability of sites. It is the objective of the Town to monitor such factors and be in a position to attract suitable industry that would take advantage of the many assets that La Plata has to offer.

The following policies reflect these objectives:

- 1) Maintain and enhance La Plata's Central Business District as the center of the town. The CB District must remain as the governmental, medical and business center from which the town derives its identity. Such a policy shall not be in conflict with, or minimize the importance of, La Plata's Commercial Highway District or the various other commercial and industrial areas within the town.
- 2) Make downtown La Plata a “pedestrian-friendly” place with adequate parking, and alternative transportation opportunities.
- 3) Minimize impacts of strip commercial development wherever possible along major streets and highways by use of planning techniques and architectural controls.
- 4) Establish economic development strategies which will offer employment opportunities and support the economic vitality of the community. Continue to follow the Four Point Approach for the development of downtown, as outlined by the National Main Street Center.
- 5) Maintain policies where development costs are paid by those who benefit from such development, especially in extending public facilities.
- 6) Business will be encouraged to participate in and support the community development goals of the Town, especially those which foster a sense of community.
- 7) Encourage the type of downtown development in the Charles Street, Washington Avenue, Kent Avenue corridor consistent with the requirements of the Plan for the Future of Downtown La Plata.
- 8) Develop strategies to address the critical issue of parking in the Central Business District.
- 9) Support the efforts of the Business District Commission to promote La Plata's downtown and commercial highway corridor.
- 10) Develop strategies to address the traffic congestion on Charles Street.
- 11) Support the downtown promotion efforts and events of the Town government.

- 12) Continue to work with the State Highway Administration to administer an access-management program for businesses along Route 301.
- 13) Review the local regulatory process for potential development, such as building and subdivision, to be sure that such process is as streamlined as practical.
- 14) Minimize undesirable industries which emit smoke, create undue noise and odors, and discharge industrial sewage, thereby enhancing public health and safety.
- 15) Enhance high quality employment opportunities by encouraging high tech and light manufacturing industries to locate in planned industrial areas.
- 16) Enhance the quality of development through architectural and landscaping controls.
- 17) Preserve and enhance unique buildings and institutions, such as county buildings, courthouse and library.
- 18) Encourage unique neighborhood design concepts, featuring pedestrian access, safety, comfort, sense of belonging, recreation areas, and unique construction and design.
- 19) Preserve existing neighborhoods.
- 20) Collaborate with the Charles County Board of Education, College of Southern Maryland and the various private schools, to enhance educational opportunities for La Plata residents.
- 21) Encourage mixed-use pattern in commercial and office areas along Route 301, with more intensive uses fronting Route 301 and gradually less intensive uses farther from Route 301.
- 22) Encourage parking behind commercial buildings. Limit auto-oriented commercial uses in a campus pattern along Route 301 within current Town corporate limits, as shown on Vision Plan conceptual land use map.
- 23) Transform Route 301 within La Plata into a business boulevard.
- 24) Work with the Civista Medical Center to be sure that their expansion needs can be met in downtown La Plata.

## **2.2C Community and Economic Development Standards and Implementation**

The following are action items for implementation of the objectives and policies for Community and Economic Development in all areas and districts of the town.

- 1) Develop a parking strategy for both the commercial districts and the industrial districts. Such a strategy should focus on the different needs of each district, focus on opportunities to create municipal parking and shared parking, as well as examining the parking requirements of the zoning code to see if such are supportive of the needs of business.
- 2) The Town will examine the feasibility of developing the tobacco warehouse property in a manner that is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the intent of the Town's Vision Plan.
- 3) The Town will examine the feasibility of relocating the Town Hall to a more central and pedestrian-friendly location such as the site of the Coke Plant.
- 4) Continue to enforce Town ordinances which reduce blight.
- 5) Continue to have the Business District Commission advise the Mayor and Council on issues that impact business.
- 6) Recruit small specialty stores to locate in the Central Business District, as envisioned by the Plan for the Future of Downtown La Plata.
- 7) Upgrade design standards for signage and landscaping within the commercial districts.
- 8) "Big Box" and other large retail stores will be discouraged from developing in or around the Town's Core Business Area.
- 9) "Big Box" and other large retail stores, where permitted, will be required to develop in accordance with architectural and other design guidelines, as established by the Town.
- 10) Have the Town Government devote the proper staff for the creation of economic development strategies and recruiting efforts.
- 11) Provide better signage to encourage patrons to use the businesses and services in the downtown area.
- 12) Develop signage standards in the Commercial Highway District and Central Business District that allow for the promotion of a business but do not lead to visual blight.
- 13) Maintain and expand County Office site to north and west.

## **2.3 Land Use Element**

### **2.3A Land Use Background**

The 1996 Comprehensive Plan made several land use recommendations, most of which have been implemented. There were also some changes to the Official Zoning Map adopted in 1996. Since the adoption of the 1996 Comprehensive Plan, the town has witnessed significant developments impacting residential land use.

### **2.3B Land Use Objectives and Policies**

Land use objectives include providing for the most efficient use of land, ensuring an appropriate mix of land uses, and ensuring they are compatible and properly situated with respect to one another and to public facilities. Land use policies are as follows:

- 1) Provide for more efficient development techniques such as clustering.
- 2) Develop innovative methods to protect and preserve sensitive areas and contiguous wildlife habitat.
- 3) Coordinate land uses and transportation facilities. Be certain that the transportation facility or transportation system will support the transportation demands of the adjacent land use.
- 4) Where feasible, and whenever possible, utilize natural features as boundaries and buffers between major land uses and provide transitional land uses between commercial, industrial and residential districts.
- 5) Avoid land use conflicts between intense and non-intense development.
- 6) Make changes to the Official Zoning Map as are appropriate and consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.
- 7) Create a tiered system of classifying Mixed Use Developments.
- 8) Create floating zones in the Central Business District which promote mixed uses.
- 9) Encourage residential densities consistent with Smart Growth.
- 10) Encourage mixed use residential on all remaining undeveloped tracts of land.

### **2.3C Land Use Standards and Implementation**

To continue this success, the following changes are recommended:

- 1) Develop methods to best implement the Forest Conservation requirements and other regulations dealing with sensitive areas so that subdivisions are built in an efficient and environmentally sensitive manner and so that contiguous wildlife habitat is created whenever possible.
- 2) Continue to require sidewalks with all new developments.
- 3) Develop a mechanism that will allow existing townhouse developments in R-10 Districts (previously allowed in R-8 Districts) as special exception uses so that those homes will not be considered nonconforming uses under the current zoning regulations.
- 4) Work to eliminate enclaves in La Plata and encourage the annexation of the two existing enclaves.
- 5) Rezone the S&G Limited Partnership parcel near Drury Drive from R-21 to CH.
- 6) Rezone the A&B Realty property on Charles Street from CH to CB.
- 7) Rezone the Southtowne Center property from a combination of R-3 and CH to all CH.
- 8) Rezone 117 La Grange Avenue from R-3 to CB.
- 9) Rezone the Turner Heirs' parcel on Route 301 as follows:

The property is currently dual-zoned as CH and R-21. Rezone the property in the same two zones but to different dimensions. The current line differentiating the R-21 and CH zoning is at a depth of 400 feet from Route 301 running in a north-south direction parallel to Route 301. Increase the depth of the CH zoned portion to 800 feet from Route 301 (and/or to the rear property lines of the neighboring properties that front on Washington Avenue). The remainder and the portion fronting Washington Avenue shall be R-21.
- 10) Rezone the Brown property on E. Hawthorne Dr. from R-21 to CH.
- 11) Rezone the Ringer property on E. Hawthorne Dr. from R-21 to CH.
- 12) Rezone the Baumgart property on E. Hawthorne Dr. from R-21 to CH.

- 13) Rezone the property on E. Hawthorne Dr. on the east side of Roy Rogers from R-21 to CH.
- 14) The Town has in its vision to create a vibrant downtown. Of particular interest in this endeavor is the section of Town which is bordered to the south by Charles Street, to the east by Kent Avenue and to the west by Washington Avenue. The northern boundary of this area is a proposed street which will be named Talbot Street. Talbot Street will be built from Kent Avenue to Route 301. In the section from Kent Avenue to Washington Avenue, the properties to the south will be zoned Central Business (CB).
- 15) Rezone the Southern Maryland Oil property on Maple Avenue from I to CB.
- 16) Rezone the Rogers property on Kent Avenue from LI to CB.
- 17) All properties to the west of Washington Avenue that are to be used for the expansion of the County Courthouse will be zoned Public Lands (PL).
- 18) Rezone the site of the Navy housing on Radio Station Road from PL to R-10.
- 19) Rezone the former Turner property on Route 488 from R-21 to PL.
- 20) Rezone the Stagecoach Crossing property from R-21 to a mixed use development which allows residential and commercial only.
- 21) Rezone the Agricopia Subdivision from its current mix of R-21, R-10 and R-3 to a mixed use development allowing for residential uses only.
- 22) Maintain the mixed use development in Steeplechase which allows for residential and commercial uses.
- 23) Maintain the mixed use development in Heritage Green which allows for residential, commercial and industrial uses.
- 24) Develop a mechanism to give the Planning Commission greater authority in establishing the types and the percentages of residential uses within a mixed use development.
- 25) Rezone the Town of La Plata property on Buckeye Circle from R-3 to LI.
- 26) Rezone the Sacred Heart Catholic Church property (Map 112, parcels 66 and 67) and the C. Louise Arehart property (Map 112, parcel 65) from R-3 to CB.

## **2.4 Transportation Element**

### **2.4A Transportation Background Information**

Transportation has been of major concern to the Town and to La Plata residents. Significant problems and opportunities exist related to transportation in all forms.

Most local vehicular traffic within La Plata must use Charles Street (Maryland Route 6). This reality, combined with the fact that Charles Street functions as a commuter road for many who live in eastern Charles County and in St. Mary's County, causes periodic congestion problems. In addition, there is great difficulty in making left hand turns from several of the side streets off of Charles Street when Charles Street is congested. Solutions to these problems are not simple or inexpensive.

La Plata does not have a good street grid. The CSX railroad tracks bisect the town, and there are only three crossings in the central portion of La Plata. This is one reason that most local traffic must rely on Charles Street. To enhance the street grid, elevated railroad crossings would have to be added, which are extremely expensive to build.

Major employment centers lie north of La Plata. Therefore, commuters from the growing areas in eastern Charles County, such as Dentsville, and in St. Mary's County must use Charles Street on their way to work. The hope is that the construction of a northern bypass, now referred to as Heritage Green Parkway, will be able to deflect some commuter traffic around downtown La Plata and ease the congestion problem.

Another regional transportation concern is the future of Crain Highway (Route 301). This road has multiple functions, serving as a local road, a commuter road and as an interstate highway. The ability of Crain Highway to be able to continue these functions into the next decade is questionable.

The Town is a member of the Charles County Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber has a transportation committee which also is concerned with the future of Crain Highway. This group meets on a monthly basis and has members from various planning agencies, the State Highway Administration, the Maryland State Police, and the Charles County Sheriff's Office, as well as area businesses.

The residents of La Plata and the surrounding region can no longer depend on Crain Highway as the sole commuter option. Alternatives will have to be found, not only from the transportation perspective, but from a clean air perspective as well. Other alternatives include telecommuting offered at Waldorf, the MTA busses from La Plata to employment north of Washington and Ride Sharing matching offered by the Tri-County Council. The Town must continue its efforts to have a voice in regional transportation issues.

## **2.4B Transportation Objectives and Policies**

Transportation objectives include development of a transportation network which will provide for safe and efficient circulation and maximize accessibility to commercial, recreational, and educational facilities for the motorist and pedestrian alike. Policies are as follows:

- 1) Maintain the working relationship with the Maryland Department of Planning, State Highway Administration, Mass Transit Administration, Tri-County Council, and the Charles County Planning Department to develop solutions to mutual transportation problems.
- 2) Develop strategies to better separate through traffic from local traffic without adversely impacting the businesses on Charles Street.
- 3) Encourage and support the development of mass transit facilities for local and regional use by cooperation among Federal, State, local and private agencies.
- 4) Eliminate accident hazards or deficiencies in existing street design.
- 5) Require adequate parking for all new development while providing enough flexibility to encourage innovative designs.
- 6) Improve the access and movement of traffic within the Central Business District.
- 7) Continue to monitor and have input in the location and/or relocation of Route 301 in or around La Plata.
- 8) Continue to find methods to improve the overall traffic grid within La Plata.
- 9) Continue to establish a strong system of sidewalks and trails.

## **2.4C Transportation Standards and Implementation**

In an effort to have La Plata be a prominent and desirable community to visit, reside and work in, improvement of traffic patterns and safety on Town streets are essential. To meet these needs, the following recommendations are suggested:

- 1) Continue efforts to have Heritage Green Parkway completed from Washington Avenue to Charles Street. Reevaluate methods for financing roadway if it has not been built by 2004.
- 2) Develop strategies to lessen traffic congestion on Charles Street without adversely affecting business.

- 3) Install sidewalks along Washington Avenue.
- 4) Add two travel lanes on Rosewick Road when St. Charles Parkway eventually connects with that road. This will be accomplished by a combination of the County building those lanes outside the corporate limits and having the subdivider of Heritage Green's contiguous parcels build the portion within that subdivision.
- 5) Require the connection of Shining Willow Way westward with Crain Highway and eastward with Heritage Green Parkway.
- 6) Require a connection from Charles Street to Rosewick Road partially along the route of Heritage Green Parkway.
- 7) Require the improvement of existing Allegany Avenue to Town specifications and its connection to Oriole Lane.
- 8) Require the construction of a road connecting Quailwood Parkway to Buckeye Circle, utilizing a stream crossing that will minimize to the greatest extent available adverse impacts of a stream crossing. It is understood that a portion of this road will have to be built outside the corporate limits as they currently are established.
- 9) Install pedestrian crossings at strategic locations, and install handicapped ramps at all needed areas on sidewalks to enhance the Town's compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- 10) Enhance the use and safety of crosswalks by enforcing motor vehicle law as it pertains to pedestrians using crosswalks.
- 11) Establish a paving overlay program as part of the Town's Capital Improvement Program.
- 12) Continue dialogue with the County's planning staff on transportation needs around La Plata.
- 13) Continue dialogue with the Maryland Department of Planning and the State Highway Administration on the development of roadways outside the corporate limits of the town.
- 14) Build a roadway that will connect Kent Avenue with Washington Avenue, then continue that roadway from Washington Avenue to Route 301. Name that street "Talbot Street".
- 15) Require the connection of Dorchester Street and Heritage Green Parkway.

- 16) Support State Highway Administration efforts to provide a right turn lane at westbound Hawthorne Drive onto the north bound lanes of Crain Highway.
- 17) Work with Charles County to expedite the planned extension of Rosewick Road to Crain Highway.
- 18) Support and promote the “VanGO” bus service offered by the Charles County Government.
- 19) Require that a new road be constructed that will connect Crain Highway with Buckeye Circle, located north of Catalpa Drive.
- 20) Require the connection of Buckeye Circle to Stagecoach Road.
- 21) Extend La Grange Avenue northward through the existing Coca Cola Bottling plant to the new Talbot Street.
- 22) Continue to work with Charles County and the State Highway Administration to plan for the anticipated Route 301 bypass which will be located on the east side of La Plata.
- 23) Connect Willow Lane with Glen Albin Road.
- 24) Extend La Grange to the south through the Mudd property so it will access the tobacco warehouse property.
- 25) Require the extension of Drury Drive northward if any properties are annexed in its projected path.
- 26) Explore with the County government and State Highway Administration the straightening of Springhill/Newtown Road so that a safer and more direct roadway can access Route 301 south of La Plata.
- 27) Work with the State Highway Administration to improve the combined intersections of Kent Avenue and Charles Street, Oak Avenue and Charles Street and North Oak Avenue and Charles Street. Such improvements may include a traffic signal.
- 28) Provide a pedestrian walkway which connects Howard Street with Centennial Street.
- 29) Construct Pender Drive to meet Town standards, and have that road dedicated to the Town.

## **2.5 Open Space and Recreation Element**

### **2.5A Open Space and Recreation Background Information**

One characteristic of a town is that residential development occurs in a far more dense fashion than in rural areas. This then places demands on the Town government to provide both passive and active recreational opportunities for its citizens. The Town's major park facility is Wills Park. That facilities includes a community building, picnic facilities, horseshoe pit, outdoor amphitheater, outdoor basketball court, sand volleyball court, tennis court, and tot lot with play structures. The Silver Linden Park has a tennis court, outdoor picnic pavilion and tot lot with play structure. The majority of the Town's other parks are small tot lots. Another passive recreation facility owned by the Town is the Redwood Lake facility in the Clarks Run subdivision. This lake is a wet stormwater pond that local citizens and the Town converted into a fishing and picnic park. The Town endeavors to provide residents and citizens of all ages with recreational facilities and opportunities.

### **2.5B Open Space and Recreation Objectives and Policies**

Objectives include providing a network of protected areas within sensitive areas and to provide contiguous wildlife habitat. Residential development should also include adequate recreational facilities in relation to the size of the development. Policies include:

- 1) Coordinate the use of required open space and required forest as part of the subdivision process to create contiguous wildlife habitat, therefore maximizing the environmental benefits of these requirements.
- 2) Develop a parks master plan with the Parks and Recreation Commission to ensure that the recreation needs of the town are properly met.
- 3) Avoid inefficient duplication of recreational facilities with the County.
- 4) Provide a sidewalk and trail system throughout the existing community and integrate into all new developments. This system should allow for safe and efficient movements of residents by walking, running or biking.
- 5) Establish system of sidewalks throughout downtown and links to downtown; establish system of trails (greenways) along natural drainage ways; establish urban "greens" at key sites in downtown area.
- 6) Locate cultural arts center within the proposed Town Center.
- 7) Upgrade the Park system by improving existing parks and creating new ones especially on the west side of Rt. 301.

- 8) Create a system of bicycle routes and sidewalks throughout Town.
- 9) Establish sidewalks and street lighting on all Town streets in the Central Business District.
- 10) Establish an “environmentally friendly” system of open space for public use.

### **2.5C Open Space and Recreation Standards and Implementation**

Action steps to implement the objectives include:

- 1) The Parks and Recreation Commission shall develop a Parks Capital Expansion Plan that will be a guide to the Mayor and Council in planning for parks in the annual budget process. This plan will also give guidance to the Planning Commission when that body reviews subdivision requests.
- 2) Annually secure funding through Program Open Space to implement the recommendations of the Parks Expansion Plan.
- 3) Tilghman Lake is currently not needed as a surface water impoundment site; therefore, develop that facility as a passive recreation park.
- 4) Establish a network of volunteers to assist with recreation events and programs of the Town.
- 5) Create a passive park on the west and north side of Town.
- 6) Request the Parks and Recreation Commission to review and expand the fee in lieu policy for Parks and implement those recommendations.

## **2.6 Housing Element**

### **2.6A Housing Background Information**

Within La Plata there exist all types of housing. Single family detached dwellings are the majority of the housing type in town. In addition, there are several townhouse communities, a few duplexes and several apartment complexes. The predominant type of dwelling unit built since 1997 has been larger single family detached houses. In addition, two communities devoted solely to senior housing were established after 1996.

La Plata is ever changing, creating new and different housing challenges. The population as a whole is getting older. Additional housing opportunities will have to be provided for those persons who wish to remain in La Plata, but do not want to maintain a large residence and lawn. Young adults establishing themselves need to be able to find suitable housing. Hard-working adults are having trouble finding affordable housing. Efforts have to be made to allow these persons who contribute to the community the opportunity to live in La Plata.

### **2.6B Housing Objectives and Policies**

Housing objectives include providing safe and quality housing for all ages and all income levels of persons in La Plata. This will include code enforcement of substandard housing, licensing rental properties, and exploring opportunities for housing for first time home buyers. Housing policies are as follows:

- 1) On large tracts of residential property, encourage mixed use developments or planned unit developments.
- 2) Support efforts to develop and build housing complexes and communities devoted to the needs of La Plata's senior population.
- 3) Continue enforcement of building and housing codes to improve housing conditions.
- 4) Promote and facilitate the use of cluster developments which allow greater incentives to the developer, and encourage the use of housing innovations and techniques while providing some of the aesthetic qualities of less densely populated areas.
- 5) Permit higher density housing as infill in and around downtown core, designed to enhance pedestrian-oriented streetscape.
- 6) Encourage residential uses in business areas downtown.

## **2.6C Housing Standards and Implementation**

Because La Plata is considered by many to be a residential community, the following recommendations are made to maintain the quality of the residential environment:

- 1) Continue to provide for a mix of housing stock.
- 2) Support efforts which will provide affordable single family homes for persons purchasing their first home.
- 3) Solicit builders who will pursue the development of housing for seniors in response to changing demographics.
- 4) Continue the enforcement of the Town's housing code.
- 5) Develop zoning relief for residential uses that became nonconforming after the adoption of the 1987 Comprehensive Plan, such as townhouses within the R-10 District.
- 6) Identify suitable site for quality townhouses and apartments.

## **2.7 Review and Regulation Element**

### **2.7A Review and Regulation Background Information**

Regulations are adopted to protect the public interest. Most land use, subdivision, zoning and land development regulations are well-intentioned. However, the cumulative impact of all of these regulations can be overwhelming and burdensome to builders and developers. Delays by local governments in issuing permits and in reviewing projects can dissuade prospective businesses from locating in that county or municipality, and can drive up the cost of residential development. Such occurrences are contrary to the objectives of the Comprehensive Plan and the Economic Development, Resource Protection and Planning Act of 1992. Therefore, efforts must be made to streamline the local review process.

### **2.7B Review and Regulation Objectives and Policies**

In an effort to address the continual changes in development practices, as well as to address additional regulations impacting development, the following recommendation is made:

- 1) Streamline the development review process, as much as is practicable, so that the public interest can be protected, but without undue delay for the builder or developer.

### **2.7C Review and Regulation Standards and Implementation**

- 1) Review the parking and signage requirements in the commercial and industrial districts so that they serve business while protecting the public interest.
- 2) The Comprehensive Plan should be evaluated by the Planning Commission every six years, and an annual report prepared each intervening year.
- 3) Develop architectural and site plan standards for:
  - a) downtown residential
  - b) downtown commercial
  - c) Route 301 corridor

### **3.0 PHYSICAL INVENTORIES**

#### **3.1 Topography - Slope**

The natural topography of La Plata ranges in elevation from 100 feet to 200 feet. The major portion of the town's land area is at an elevation of 180 feet, reflecting the plateau characteristic of the town's site. More important than the range of elevation is the steepness of slope. Development on steep slopes can present serious problems, such as excessive street grades and erosion. Slope categories and their implications for urban development are listed below:

##### **3.1A Soils<sup>1</sup>**

Soils are another important factor in determining land development capabilities. The Town of La Plata has a number of soils which can be identified by characteristics and capabilities into six natural soil groups.

- (A1) Evesboro, Rumford, Gravelly: These soils have good potential for urban development. They are, however, very susceptible to erosion when vegetation is removed from slopes, and the excessive permeability presents possible contamination of groundwater where septic fields are used.
- (B1) Sassafras-Wickham: These soils are some of the best for adaptability to urban uses. They are well drained, can be easily excavated, and will generally pass percolation tests for septic tank application.
- (B2) Aura-Croom: These soils have slight or no limitations for urban use. Although they have good surface drainage, they are slow in permeability, and septic tank fields do not function well. Even if these soils pass percolation tests there is a good possibility that effluent will seep to the surface from lateral movement. Grading of lots should be held to a minimum as material below two to three feet is poor for plant growth.
- (E2) Beltsville-Exum: These soils have moderate limitations for urban use. The soils are moderately well drained with a perched water table and slow permeability, severely limiting them for septic tank absorption fields. The subsoils are too dense to absorb effluent, which will then likely rise to the surface. Grading should be minimized as the subsoil is a poor medium to establish lawns or gardens.
- (F3) Leonardtown: This soil has severe limitations for practically all aspects of urban use. It is characterized by poor natural drainage, poor engineering properties, poor permeability and stability, as well as a high water table.

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<sup>1</sup>Source: Maryland Department of state Planning, Natural Soil Groups of Maryland, Technical Series, December, 1973.

(G2) Bibb: Severe wetness and flooding make this soil unsuitable for urbanization.

### **3.1B Natural Drainage**

Rainfall is partially absorbed by vegetation and soils, while the remainder is runoff which creates the natural drainage pattern of rivers and streams. Conversion of "natural" ground to urban use substantially increases runoff as impervious roofs, roads, and parking lots replace vegetation and soil area. As a result of extensive leveling and grading, development may also reduce the capacity of the natural drainage system to accommodate increased runoff. Increased runoff requires increased absorption and drainage capacity if erosion and flooding are to be avoided. Storm sewers can provide assistance in accommodating runoff. It is best, however, if the major natural drainage pattern is utilized, with vegetation along the water course maintained to prevent erosion. The major natural drainage courses thus represent limitations to development.

### **3.1C Development Suitability**

Development suitability will be determined by combining development capabilities relative to the previous analyses of slopes, soils, and drainage. Suitability is broken down into three categories:

- 1) Suitable for high intensity commercial, industrial or residential development with public services available:
  - Level to gently sloping (0-8%)
  - (A1) Evesboro, Rumford and Gravelly soils
  - (B1) Sassafras and Wickham soils
  - (B2) Aura and Croom soils
  - (E2) Beltsville and Exum soils
- 2) Suitable for low to moderate intensity residential development:
  - Moderate slopes (8-15%)
  - (F3) Leonardtown soils
- 3) Suitable for only very low intensity residential development. Special development restrictions are necessary to safeguard the environment. Most appropriate use is open space or park land.
  - (G2) Bibb soils
  - Major natural drainage courses

### **3.2 Existing Development**

Between the 1990 census and the 2000 census Charles County remained one of the fastest growing county in the State. Charles County's population has increased by almost 20,000 since 1990.

#### **3.2A Land Use**

The majority of La Plata's recent residential growth has occurred within planned subdivisions.

Since 1996, the majority of the residential development occurred in the Kings Grant subdivision. In addition, there was moderate development in three smaller subdivisions along Washington Avenue; Panquia Oaks, Northchase and Willowgate. The last remaining subdivision devoted solely to townhouses, Charleston Terrace, built out since 1996. The planned unit development, Hickory Ridge, saw moderate development as well. A new subdivision, Agricopia Farms, received preliminary plat approval and construction has begun in its first section.

There was significant activity in the commercial districts since 1996. A WalMart was built along Route 301. The Post Office relocated to a new site on Centennial Street and the Rescue Squad built a new building on nearby Calvert street. The Mitchell family bought the old Vacciano site on St. Mary's Avenue, razed the old building which was an eyesore in the downtown and built an attractive two-story office building. A new retail business, Sycamore Accents, occupied the original Farrall store on Maple Street, and created a unique gift store with a regional following. Across the street, the owners of Casey Jones restaurant purchased the two adjacent properties, expanded the facility and now have a restaurant of regional acclaim. The Fire Department relocated to a site on Washington Avenue.

The annexations table on the following pages displays all recorded annexations since 1963. These annexations benefitted the Town through a series of public improvements, such as water and sewer main extensions and improvements to transportation patterns.

**ANNEXATIONS RECORDED IN TOWN RESOLUTIONS BOOKS  
(BEGINNING IN 1963)**

RESOLUTION NUMBER	NUMBER OF ACRES	ZONED	NAME/LOCATION/NOTES	EFFECTIVE DATE
3	15.440	(Municipal Park)	Posey (Kenneth Carlisle) Annexation - Town bought to use as municipal park: Wills Park, St. Mary's Ave.	Sept. 20, 1963
40/C.A.R. 72-1	31.480	R-2	Hayden Annexation - 7 separate properties, including the cemetery, Charowood, Marvin Gardens; St. Mary's Ave. and Glen Albin Rd. area.	Sept. 11, 1972
40/C.A.R. 72-2	365.4034	R-1	Ellenwood Annexation - now Clarks Run Subdivisions I & II.	Dec. 11, 1972
73-1	1006.466	R-1 R-2 R-5 I-1	Eastern Annexation - 23 separate properties annexed in order to annex 63.51 acres Town obtained as surplus property from Federal Govt. for lake and water plant. (Former East Coast Army Radio Receiving Station, Radio Station Rd.)	Special Elec. 10-22-73. Passed 187 to 100. Effective 10-16-73.
74-3	12.809	R-1	Northern Boundary Correction Annexation - 12 separate properties in the area of Washington Ave. and Harford St.; to correct boundaries in annexation circa 1948.	Jan. 25, 1975
74-4	73.98	R-1	Walter Mitchell Annexation-Board of Education-School site now; when zoned R-1 also approved for public school use.	Mar. 1, 1975
C.A.R. 77-1	25.5	R-21	ANS Annexation; to upgrade Town Sewage Treatment Plant.	May 14, 1977
C.A.R. 77-2	6.522	R-8	Albrittain, St. Mary's Ave.; now Maxwellton Subdivision.	Aug. 12, 1977
C.A.R. 78-1	169	I	Conner-Garner Annexation - 16 separate properties on Rt. 301 south; now the site of Alban Tractor and Southern Maryland Trade Center.	Apr. 15, 1978
C.A.R. 78-2	0.364	R-8	Covington Annexation - Land of Barbara Ann Thomas (Covington); corner of Scroggins St. and Lee St.; septic system problems.	July 7, 1978
C.A.R. 78-3	1.262	R-21	Newman Annexation - on Rt. 6 nr Clarks Run II Subdivision.	Oct. 9, 1978
C.A.R. 78-5	0.87	R-8	Thomas Annexation (Inez Thomas) - on Lee St. behind Covington Annexation lot; septic system problems.	Jan. 15, 1979
C.A.R. 80-1	137.192	R-8 & R-21	Quailwood, Rt. 6 (road through to Rt. 225/Hawthorne Rd.)	Mar. 30, 1981

RESOLUTION NUMBER	NUMBER OF ACRES	ZONED	NAME/ LOCATION/NOTES	EFFECTIVE DATE
C.A.R. 87-3	0.804	R-10	Scroggins Annexation - Amy Scroggins; at end of Lodge St. as it turns onto Scroggins St.; septic system problems.	Nov. 30, 1987
C.A.R. 87-4	1.0	R-10	Gray Annexation - Barbara Gray; north side Rt. 225 (Hawthorne Rd.); septic system problems.	Nov. 30, 1987
C.A.R. 87-6	194.352	R-21	King's Grant, Rt. 488 across from Town's right-of-way road into water plant/lake property; residential development.	Feb. 9, 1988
C.A.R. 88-5	1.15	R-21	Wright Annexation - Joseph T. Wright; Oak Ave. (now Glen Albin Rd.) nr entrance to Mitchell School; water line ROW.	Nov. 2, 1988
C.A.R. 88-8	8.0572	R-10	Maryland Quality Homes Annexation - east side of Washington Ave., next to James Mudd. (Willowgate Sub.)	Mar. 31, 1989
C.A.R. 88-9	73.88	R-21 & C-H	Morris-Kneib Annexation, Rt. 301 and on Washington Ave.; commercial and residential development.	Sept. 22, 1989
C.A.R. 89-1	0.28	R-10	Mary Lancaster Annexation, Oak Ave. nr Somers School; water problems.	June 16, 1989
89-10	60 +/-	R-21	Mary Ball Annexation, both sides of Washington Ave.; extending water and sewer mains under CDBG program; 24 dwelling units, 73 residents.	Feb. 23, 1990
89-11	805.691	M-U	Davis Annexation; Heritage Green, north of Hickory Ridge, main access from Rt. 6 to Washington Ave. to be 4 lanes; commercial and residential development.	Special Elec. 6-14-90. Passed 649 to 562. Effective 6-28-90.
C.A.R. 91-1	11.70839	C-H LI	Farrall Annexation; easternmost SE portion (3.034 ac.) zoned C-H; remainder (3.258 ac.) zoned LI; includes approximately 5 ½ ac. of Rt. 301 ROW; light industrial and commercial development.	July 15, 1992
C.A.R. 94-1	382.06 +/-	R-21	Stagecoach Crossing Annexation; southwestern quadrant of Town, south of Southern Maryland Trade Center, down to and along Stagecoach Road.	May 10, 1996
C.A.R. 97-1	.32	R-10	Charlotte L. Winters Annexation; Oak Ave., next to Lancaster lot, near Somers School property; to have holding tank for sewer, under County program.	Oct. 10, 1997

RESOLUTION NUMBER	NUMBER OF ACRES	ZONED	NAME/LOCATION/NOTES	EFFECTIVE DATE
C.A.R. 98-1	113.637	R-21	Royal Charter Annexation, contiguous to King's Grant Sub.; no existing dwellings.	Sept. 10, 1999
C.A.R. 00-1	.9933	R-21	Grace Lutheran Church; parking lot expansion for church expansion; no existing dwellings.	July 12, 2000
Res. 01-1 Amended	88.0417	P-L	County Commissioners of Charles County; on west side of Radio Station Rd., north of MFRI	June 22, 2001

The Mayor and Council have maintained the tradition that a potential annexation must do something to make the existing town a better place to live for the current residents. This standard has guided the elected body in the approval or disapproval of annexation requests since the adoption of the 1996 Plan. For example, the Mayor and Council agreed to the Stagecoach Crossing annexation because that property has a site for a potential surface water impoundment. If this impoundment is developed it will provide about a million gallons of water per day for the residents of La Plata.

The Mayor and Council act on annexation requests on a case by case basis. Again, they traditionally weigh whether or not the potential annexation will make the town a better place to live, or whether there is a compelling reason to annex the property.

Beginning at the northern boundary of the town and moving east, there have been conversations with the property owners of the Connell and Miller parcels regarding annexation. These parcels are mostly undeveloped and their immediate annexation is unlikely due to the fact that existing water and sewer mains are far from the properties. Moving further east, there is little annexation potential because of the presence of valuable sensitive area within the Zekiah Swamp. Some of the property in this quadrant is owned by the Interstate General Corporation and is slated for development as part of the St. Charles project.

It should also be noted that the Town is required to demonstrate to the Maryland Department of Planning that the respective local government can meet the demand for Town and County services generated by an annexation. In planning for such services, the Planning Commission must be certain that the Town can adequately provide municipal services to existing properties before additional land is annexed.

### **3.2B Residential Uses**

The majority of the land in La Plata is devoted to residential use. The quality of life in La Plata plus the general growth within the Southern Maryland region of the State have contributed to the demand for additional housing in La Plata.

Since 1996, the majority of residential building permits have been for dwellings. There have been several housing projects devoted solely to seniors since 1996. Washington Square, located on Washington Avenue, consists of duplexes for those 55 years of age and older. The Maples Foundation built a senior community at the corner of Crain Highway and Port Tobacco Road. This community consists of an apartment building, and eighteen cottages. An assisted living facility has been built at the corner of Washington Avenue and Heritage Green Parkway.

Below is a table showing the general characteristics of residential uses within La Plata.

#### **LA PLATA HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS (Census Information)**

	1970	1980	1990	2000
1. Number of housing units	531	885	2009	2308
2. Owner occupied housing units	50%	67%	64%	68%
3. Rental units	44%	33%	33%	32

### **3.2C Commercial - Industrial**

Commercial and industrial uses can be found within several areas in La Plata. The older commercial district is referred to as the Central Business District and generally is located along Charles Street and La Grange Avenue. The Commercial Highway District includes those commercial uses along Crain Highway. Potential industrial parcels are located in two mixed use developments.

Since 1996, the regional mall in St. Charles continues to have a significant impact on existing retail uses and potential new retail uses within La Plata. In addition, new “Big Box” retail in Waldorf and now in La Plata, challenges the existing retail businesses in La Plata.

La Plata has a unique opportunity with its Central Business District. Many small towns across the country have experienced loss of business and the abandonment of buildings in their downtowns. In La Plata there has been little growth in retail uses within the Central Business District. However, there exists little empty commercial space. Most of that space is occupied by professional offices, primarily medical or legal. In addition, there remains a limited amount of land where new businesses within this district can be built.

In 1999, a group of citizens, business people and local officials worked together to create a vision for La Plata. From that vision, an urban design plan (“The Plan for the Future of Downtown La Plata”) was developed which outlined a bold plan to create new commercial space where existing industrial uses existed.

The Town built the first phase of Centennial Street, which connected La Grange Avenue with St. Mary's Avenue. The second phase connecting St. Mary's Avenue to Crain Highway has also been completed. The Town, working with the local Legislative Delegation, Congressman and the U.S. Postal Service, was successful in having the new La Plata Post Office built on this section of Centennial Street. It was a key goal of the Town to keep the post office in the Central Business District.

Adequate parking for La Plata's downtown continues to be a concern. The price of land is usually at a premium within the Central Business District, making off-street parking expensive. The Town has addressed this problem by leasing some parking lots for public use, such as at the Sacred Heart Church and by building a small parking lot on North Maple Street.

As part of the Davis Annexation, which was zoned as a Mixed Use District, and after the subsequent review of the proposed Heritage Green project, acreage was reserved for industrial use. This industrial area was designated as the land north of Rosewick Road. Development of this industrial land remains a priority for the Town.

### **3.3 Community Facilities**

Demand for adequate public facilities has increased due to population increases in both La Plata and Charles County, stricter regulation and greater citizen expectations. Planning for these facilities remains an essential responsibility of local government.

#### **3.3A Transportation**

Growth in and around La Plata has placed increased demands on the existing transportation systems. Vehicular traffic along Charles Street has increased due to development within La Plata and development east of La Plata. This fact, combined with the reality that the existing road system does not provide a good grid along the Charles Street corridor, leads to traffic problems on Charles Street. The problems along Charles Street include difficulty for motorists on Kent Avenue, La Grange Avenue and Oak Avenue making left turns onto Charles Street. During high traffic times, there is a problem with traffic stacking on Washington Avenue and on Charles Street.

The Town annexed a large parcel of property in 1990, referred to as the Davis Annexation. It was the hope of the Town that a minor arterial street would be built through this annexed parcel connecting Charles Street with Washington Avenue. It was the further hope that this roadway would continue from Washington Avenue to Crain Highway through the Morris Annexation. Heritage Green Parkway has been built from Crain Highway to Washington Avenue, but the connection to Charles Street has not been accomplished.

The traffic along Crain Highway has increased significantly. Growth in Southern Maryland, combined with the fact that Crain Highway is the only north-south major arterial roadway serving the La Plata, White Plains, St. Charles and Waldorf population centers, has placed pressures on this roadway. In addition, many vacationers and tourists cross the Potomac River at the Governor Nice Bridge as an alternative to crossing on the Wilson Bridge near Alexandria, Virginia. The future of Crain Highway will be of great concern to La Plata. To that end, La Plata elected and appointed officials should continue to be active participants in the planning process for this roadway.

Rosewick Road is planned to be connected with St. Charles Parkway. This connection will allow the motorist another north-south route into Waldorf and St. Charles. This connection should be completed by the end of the decade.

Much of the road system in La Plata was built after 1980. In 1992 the Mayor and Council repaved all of the streets in the older part of town. Such a maintenance program will have to be continued throughout the decade to address the streets built in the newer subdivisions.

#### **3.3B Utilities**

As a result of the soil types and land contours being generally unsuitable for on-site septic systems, the Town's central sewage system has been the most influencing factor in the recent growth of the town. Without such systems, high density residential development, the schools, Civista Medical Center, and other high water users would not be found in La Plata.

### **3.3B-1 Wastewater**

The capacity of the wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) was increased from 0.3 million gallons per day (MGD) to 1.0 MGD in the late 1970's. The Town again increased the capacity of the WWTP to meet the needs of recent annexations and to meet the requirements of stricter effluent standards. Construction of the WWTP expansion began in 2000. This project will convert the wastewater process to biological nutrient removal. This project also expanded the capacity of the WWTP from 1.0 mgd to 1.5 mgd. The ultimate capacity of the plant is 2.5 mgd. Unless environmental regulations become too restrictive, the capacity should meet the ultimate anticipated build-out within the existing corporate limits.

Inflow and infiltration of rain water continue to hamper wastewater operations. Efforts need to continue to minimize the negative impacts of the rainwater leaking into the sanitary sewer system. These efforts will include vigorous inspection of newly laid sewer mains, identifying voids in the system, and making repairs to those voids.

### **3.3B-2 Water**

Water production, treatment, storage and distribution are functions that the Town provides for its citizens. The Town uses only groundwater to supply the residences and businesses in La Plata. According to the engineering firm of Davis, Bowen and Freidel, the advantages of groundwater as a water supply are numerous. Groundwater typically has a uniform temperature throughout the year, frequently requires no treatment, is less expensive than impounding reservoirs, and the amount of water available can be closely approximated. In addition, groundwater rarely contains the bacteria and solids found in raw surface water.

Five wells produce the daily water for the town and there does exist potential for a surface source to be added. The Town added an additional production well in 1998 which produced about 450 gallons per minute. For a water system such as La Plata's, solely supplied by groundwater sources, the peak average daily flow rate should be met by the well supplies within 16 hours, with the largest facility out of service. The Town meets this requirement; however, additional water sources should be secured soon. The Planning Commission has expressed that the development of a surface water impoundment should be of top priority.

The Maryland Geological Survey has supplied the Town with records of the water levels within the Town's primary water source. These levels have been decreasing each year. The decrease has been due to the increase in water demand in La Plata, and due to the fact that Charles County has drilled several large producing wells within the same water source. In a 1998 study, the Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland made a troubling prediction. It was revealed that water demand would outpace water production in portions of Southern Maryland by the year 2020.

Decreasing water level is a concern for two reasons. First, if groundwater is being pumped at a greater rate than the aquifer is being recharged, the effect is what is known as water mining. When water mining occurs, the life of the water source becomes finite. Depending upon the individual circumstance, there may be only years of life left in the aquifer, or there may be decades, but the life is limited. The second reason is that as the level of the water decreases, the pump must be lowered to match this decline. Costs of operation increase as pumps are lowered. Bigger motors, using more electricity, are needed to produce the same amount of water.

Charles County is part of the Atlantic Coastal Plains and is underlaid with sedimentary deposits over

crystalline Pre-Cretaceous rocks. These rocks, frequently called the basement, are approximately 2000 feet deep under La Plata and all known water producing formations are above them. There are four major water bearing formations in Charles County: the Aquia, the Magothy, the Patapsco and the Patuxent. La Plata has three wells in the Lower Patapsco formation, also known as the La Plata formation.

The quality of the water in La Plata is currently considered good. The Town, like all water systems, must test its water as required by the Safe Drinking Water Act. The Town informs its water customers yearly about the water through a consumer confidence report.

The Town will investigate the possibility of adding a surface water treatment plant as the next water source. In addition, the Mayor and Council will continue to encourage the County Commissioners to work with the Town in developing a long term water strategy.

### **3.3B-3 Stormwater**

Efforts to regulate stormwater have been increasing steadily. The harmful consequence of a high quantity of stormwater run-off can be property damage due to flooding. The quality of stormwater run-off is also important. Removing sediment from stormwater is desirable so that the Chesapeake Bay will be protected from this potential pollutant.

The Town has the desire to build a central stormwater detention facility within the southwest quadrant of the town. The goals with this facility are to provide stormwater management for older sections of town that were built before stormwater management was a concern, and to offer new construction in the downtown the opportunity to address their stormwater needs off-site. There is greater utility and greater efficiency if stormwater treatment is treated on a regional basis rather than on a per site basis. This will have to be done in conformance with recently adopted stormwater management regulations.

### **3.3C Parks and Recreation Facilities**

The Town owns and operates several passive and active recreational facilities. These facilities are created in two general ways. First, the Town requires that subdividers either provide parks for their subdivision or pay a fee in lieu of parkland dedication or reservation, to be applied to larger Town park development projects. Second, the Town purchases property and develops a park or recreational facility. There have been few recreational facilities created since 1996. It is recommended that all final subdivision plats submitted to the Town be reviewed by the Parks and Recreation Commission, and their recommendation be provided to the Town Manager and the Planning Commission.

Wills Park is the Town's primary active recreational facility. It has a community building, a tot lot, an outdoor basketball court, a tennis court, a beach volleyball area, numerous picnic tables, an outdoor amphitheater, and a horseshoe pit. In 2000, the Parks and Recreation Commission had all new playground equipment installed that not only enhanced the park, but also complied with modern playground equipment standards.

The Clarks Run subdivision has two Town-owned recreational facilities. Silver Linden Park has a tennis court, a jungle gym and a picnic pavilion. In 2001, the playground equipment was removed and replaced

with similar equipment to Wills Park. Redwood Lake is a passive recreational facility centered around a wet stormwater management facility. The local homeowners association has worked to improve this area to make it a pleasant place to have a picnic, watch wildlife or catch a fish.

The Town maintains several tot lots in smaller subdivisions. They include The Meadows, Redwood Manor and Patuxent Court. The Town also owns a large tract of land with Tilghman Lake at the center. The purpose of this lake was to serve as a potential water impoundment. The Town has decided that it no longer needs the lake as a water source due to the limited amount of water it could produce. Therefore, the Parks and Recreation Commission began planning for Tilghman Lake to become a passive recreation park.

Until 1992, the Town did not receive any funding through the Program Open Space program operated by the State of Maryland. Program Open Space provides funding for acquisition and development of open space and park land. The Town has been given access to this funding, which should accelerate the development of future open space and recreation areas.

### **3.3D Police Protection**

Police protection had been offered to the citizens of La Plata by utilizing a combination of La Plata Police Department officers and officers from other agencies. In 1994, the La Plata Police Department began providing primary patrol on all shifts. The La Plata Police Department will continue to rely on the Charles County Sheriff's Office and the Maryland State Police for support and to provide specialized police services that the La Plata Police Department cannot offer.

### **3.3E Medical Facilities**

La Plata residents have access to a variety of medical facilities within the town. At the center is Civista Health, Inc. The hospital has been active in keeping pace with the changing medical needs of the citizens of La Plata and Charles County.

There exist a number of medical professionals who maintain offices in La Plata. These professionals also provide a valuable service to the community and help the citizens have access to quality medical care. Many communities across the country have difficulty attracting medical professionals to their communities. Such is not the case in La Plata.

An associated element of health care is the provision of nursing homes. There are two nursing homes in La Plata. The Charles County Nursing and Rehabilitation Center was constructed in 1976. The second nursing home is the Genesis Eldercare/La Plata Center on Magnolia Drive. Both average a 90% occupancy rate. There exists a need for quality facilities such as these. That need should increase as the population of the county becomes older.

Located on Radio Station Road are two health care facilities: the F. B. Gwynn Center, for mentally and physically handicapped persons, and the Spring Dell Center, for adults with physical and mental disorders. Both facilities are daytime operations with patients either being returned to their homes or to other medical facilities.

On Box Elder Road is the Charles County Residential Center, operated by the Charles County Association for Handicapped and Retarded Citizens, Inc. (HARC). The facilities consist of three full-time residential dwellings for children and adults who have severe mental and physical disabilities.

### **3.3F Education**

La Plata has more schools within the corporate limits than are needed to support the educational needs of La Plata children. The Charles County Board of Education has chosen to locate such schools in La Plata because of the availability of water and sewer, because of La Plata's location in the county, and because the Board owns considerable land in La Plata.

The Walter J. Mitchell Elementary School and the Mary H. Matula Elementary School are the two public elementary schools in La Plata. The Milton M. Somers Middle School is the only middle school in La Plata, and La Plata High School is the only high school within the corporate limits.

Archbishop Neale School, Christ Church Day School and Grace Lutheran School are three church affiliated private schools in La Plata. All have healthy enrollments.

College of Southern Maryland is located approximately five miles northwest of La Plata. The college continues to grow in enrollment and has added several new buildings in recent years. The college enjoys an excellent academic reputation.

The Charles County Library has its main branch on the corner of Charles Street and Garrett Avenue. The Charles County library system is tied into other library systems within the State so that reference materials can be shared.

### **3.3G Post Office**

The La Plata Post Office, in its new location on Centennial Street, has been very important to the central business area of the town. Citizens meet at the Post Office not only to get mail, but to also socialize with neighbors and friends. This pattern is one of the little things that contribute to the small town atmosphere of La Plata. In addition, many residents plan their shopping around the trip to the Post Office, which benefits several La Plata businesses.

### **3.3H Fire and Emergency Rescue Services**

#### **3.3H-1 Background Information**

Fire protection in the Town of La Plata is provided by a volunteer Fire Department, and the Charles County Rescue Squad ("CCRS") based in La Plata provides basic life support service. Both of these departments are funded by a dedicated countywide fire tax administered by the Charles County Board of Fire and Rescue Commissioners. These funds are supplemented by periodic contributions by the citizens of La Plata and by the Town government. In addition, the Town supplies fire hydrants for fire protection and a supply of potable water to the fire station at no cost to the fire department.

### **3.3H-2 Emergency Medical and Rescue Service**

The Charles County Rescue Squad was founded more than fifty years ago. Initially, it was the only ambulance service that was available. As additional volunteer fire departments were formed, many of them acquired an ambulance, but the Town of La Plata and its vicinity are still served primarily by CCRS. This squad now responds to more than 2000 calls each year with a steadily dwindling cadre of volunteers. As a result, there were many times during the middle of the day when it took 15 minutes or more to get an ambulance on the scene. In July, 2001, the County Commissioners hired a number of full time emergency medical technicians to ensure a more reliable and faster response to life threatening emergencies.

Because of the uncertain and frequently delayed response to medical emergencies, the Mayor and Council made the decision to purchase several automated external defibrillators last year. All of the sworn officers on the La Plata Police Department have been trained and are fully qualified to use this equipment when no ambulance is readily available.

### **3.3H-3 Fire Station**

The La Plata Volunteer Fire Department presently operates three engine companies and a truck company from a fire station located on Washington Avenue. It has recently purchased a new 3000 gallon tanker, primarily for use in the rural area the department protects, but readily available within the corporate limits if a water emergency occurs. A new fire station was recently constructed on Washington Avenue. The old station was in a good location to serve the Central Business District, but was not large enough to house the new ladder truck that the fire department plans to purchase sometime within the next few years. It was also critically short of parking for the volunteers when they responded to an alarm. Due to the method of construction and the size of the property, it was not practical to enlarge the existing building and the decision was made to purchase a tract of land on Washington Avenue near the intersection with Shining Willow Way and build a new station.

The new location will undoubtedly cause some traffic problems and delayed response time during the normal work week. A great deal of congestion, with corresponding delays, develops near the intersection of Washington Avenue and Charles Street, both during the morning and afternoon rush hours. Washington Avenue is a narrow street and there is no way for traffic waiting for the traffic light to get out of the way of emergency vehicles responding to an alarm. There are a number of improvements included in La Plata's Vision Plan and Plan for the Future of Downtown La Plata for the business district that will help to alleviate some of these problems. When the relocated Talbot Street is completed with direct access from the County Office Complex to Route 301, probably some time in 2002, it should significantly reduce the congestion at Washington Avenue and Charles Street. The plan also includes redesigning and installing a traffic light at the intersection of Oak Avenue and Charles Street.

Probably the most important changes involve completion of Shining Willow Way to Route 301 and the Route 6 Connector from Route 6 at Willow Lane to Heritage Green Parkway. After these changes have been made, the fire department will be able to access all the major highways without driving down Washington Avenue and coping with the heavy traffic in the Central Business District.

### **3.3H-4 ISO Rating**

The Insurance Services Office (ISO) performed an evaluation of the Town's fire protection capabilities in 1992. As a result of that survey, the public protection classification rating was improved from class 6 to class 4. One of the primary reasons for the change was the water system improvements that had been made since the last evaluation. The population of La Plata more than doubled since the last ISO survey, and the additions made to the water system to serve the new residents have been installed in accordance with NFPA Standards. The Town installed more than a mile of upgraded water lines in 1988 to improve the quality of water as well as increase the available fire flow from the fire hydrants in the "old town". At the time the change was made, one of the insurance agents in La Plata estimated that the taxpayers would save up to \$25,000 annually in insurance premiums because of the improved rating. In addition to the insurance savings, fire loss has been kept to a minimum because of the quality of protection the fire department provides.

One of the factors the ISO uses in evaluating a fire department is the percentage of the built up area that is within one and a half miles of the closest engine company. When the fire station was located on Charles Street, most of the major risks were within a few blocks and nearly all of them were within the recommended engine company coverage area. Travel time from the new location will be significantly longer to the Central Business District, and it is possible that the ISO rating may drop when the Town is surveyed again.

According to its Charter, the Town is responsible for providing fire protection to its citizens. It has been the policy of the Town to depend on the volunteer fire department to provide this service, with primary funding from the County Fire Tax. Since the Town makes only a minimal contribution from the general fund to the operation of the fire department each year, the Mayor and Council were unable to influence its decision to move out of the downtown area. It may be time for the Town to consider some additional financial support, or provide a building to be used as a substation, to enable the fire department to continue to provide the type of fire protection that the hospital, courthouse, churches and other large buildings on Charles Street need and want.

### **3.3H-5 Personnel**

Since the La Plata Volunteer Fire Department is operated entirely by volunteers, there are times when it is difficult to provide enough personnel to adequately staff the apparatus. Several of the full time employees of the Town are members of the volunteer fire department. They have been designated "call firemen" and are authorized to respond to the fire station on all structure fires during normal working hours. This added resource has increased the average response of volunteers and helped to attain the class 4 ISO rating.

The La Plata Volunteer Fire Department currently responds to well over 1000 calls a year, and the number of volunteer members is limited. Attracting additional volunteers is adversely impacted by the tendency of the Town to become a bedroom community with many of the residents commuting to remote locations to work every day. The demands of the long commute limit the time they have available for volunteer activities and makes recruiting and retaining volunteers more difficult. One factor that works in favor of the system is the fact that many of the members of the department are full time career employees of fire departments in neighboring jurisdictions and are involved in shift work. These career firefighters frequently spend their days off at the La Plata fire station and are available to respond immediately when a

call is received. The Town should do everything possible to educate the citizens of the Town on the activities of the volunteer fire department and to help them to recruit additional members as needed.

### **3.3H-6 Training Facilities**

The Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute has a very well equipped training academy located within the Town limits. This training center has all the facilities needed for an effective training program. It is scheduled for a major renovation and upgrade that will make it even better. This construction should be completed within the next few years. This facility is available for use by the fire department for in-service and company level training and the department should be encouraged to make use of it.

This facility is used by fire departments all over Southern Maryland and many specialized training classes are held there. The Town of La Plata provides the needed water supply for these activities and any other support that is needed.

### **3.3H-7 Fire Department Water Supply**

During the ISO evaluation in 1992, the La Plata Water System scored 32.46 out of a possible 40 points. Based on this rating, it should be possible to improve the ISO evaluation even further if the fire department is successful in improving some of the areas that received less than the maximum. The fire department scored a total of 30.11 out of a possible 50 points.

The fire flow improvement project completed by the Town in 1988, where more than a mile of additional fire mains were installed to loop various portions of the system and increase the size of the lines in others, has greatly improved the available flow in many areas. The citizens in the old town, where the front foot benefit charge was levied to pay for these improvements, will receive the benefits of lowered insurance rates in some cases, as well as the improved fire protection.

The longstanding policy of the Town is to require developers to install water lines that are large enough to provide the needed fire flow when the area is fully developed. This policy has also paid large dividends in improved fire protection for all property owners and residents. One example was the annexation of the commercial/industrial area on the west side of Route 301, north of the old town limits. When the developer of the self-storage warehouses installed an 8" line along the highway and looped it to the system from Washington Avenue, the available fire flow at the Food Lion store increased from 550 gpm to more than 1100 gpm. Continued improvement will be needed to maintain the existing ISO rating, attempt to improve it and to provide an adequate level of fire protection to large structures when they are constructed throughout the Town.

Another improvement that was made was the institution of a regular program of fire hydrant testing and painting each hydrant with a color code to indicate the maximum flow. These tests should be done on a regular basis and accurate records maintained.

### **3.3I Historic Sites Inventory**

The Town of La Plata incorporated in 1888 but was actually established some years earlier due to the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad locating a train depot, general store and telegraph office in La Plata. La Plata grew as a result of the railroad, eventually attracting many merchants and professional establishments

from the Village of Port Tobacco.

Port Tobacco was then the County Seat and was the location of the County Courthouse. After many of the merchants left Port Tobacco for the growing La Plata community and its railroad, citizens began to call for the removal of the County Seat and the Courthouse to La Plata. An election in May of 1892 resulted in a narrow victory for Port Tobacco; however, in August of that year, the central portion of the Port Tobacco Courthouse burned down. Court records had been removed prior to the blaze, which provides Charles County with an unbroken line of court records. Court business was conducted in the two remaining wings of the Port Tobacco Courthouse and in homes located on the village square.

Another special election was held which decided in favor of moving the County Seat and Courthouse to La Plata. A Maryland Assembly Act in 1894 provided for the removal of the County Seat from Port Tobacco to La Plata. Until the new courthouse was built in 1896, court business was conducted in the Town Hall. Following a lawsuit against the County Commissioners, to prevent them from issuing bonds to pay for construction of the new courthouse, all three circuit court judges decided in favor of the County Commissioners. A courthouse and jail were to be constructed in La Plata, which became the County Seat in 1895.

Much of La Plata's history relates to the move to La Plata of those merchants, business and professional men, and to the La Plata Train Station established by the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad. Many of the homes and businesses they constructed still exist. Only a small portion of the original courthouse remains as it has been renovated and added onto many times since its original construction. The original jail still stands at 9 Washington Avenue.

The following is a list of significant historical structures within the Town of La Plata's corporate limits:

La Plata Train Station, 1873

Moved to a new location on Kent Avenue in 2000

Thomas R. Farrall Store and House:

1st store and house - DeAngelis Building, built 1872

(This is the oldest structure in La Plata's business district.)

600 Charles Street

2nd store - built circa 1890

corner of North Maple Avenue and Charles Street, on the west side of the railroad tracks

(now houses Sycamore Accents Gift Shop)

2nd house - built 1890 (now houses Mental Health offices) 406 Charles Street

The Boswell House, circa 1884

(home of Heber Boswell, a Clerk of the Court)

103 Oak Avenue

The Roberts House, circa 1885

(home of Hubert Roberts, one of La Plata's original merchants)

603 Wicomico Street

The Smoot House, built 1893  
(home of David Smoot, builder of first hotel in La Plata, circa 1892)  
105 Oak Avenue

The Owen House, built 1893  
(home of Thomas T. Owen, one of La Plata's original merchants)  
104 Oak Avenue

The Horney House, circa 1895  
(home of Robert P. Horney, who opened La Plata's first  
restaurant, circa 1885)  
5 Oak Avenue

Courthouse, originally constructed in 1896 (many additions since then)  
200 Charles Street

La Plata Jail, circa 1897  
9 Washington Avenue (corner of Washington Avenue and Baltimore Street)

La Grange, circa 1763  
201 Port Tobacco Road

Hermitage, circa 1820  
309 Washington Avenue

Mitchell Building, circa 1893; now Steffens Building  
317 Charles Street

W. T. Maurice House, later Ferdinand Cooksey House, 1894  
(now houses Barbour & Zverina law offices)  
107 St. Mary's Avenue

Sydney E. Mudd House, addition to the original built circa 1896  
(now houses Mudd & Mudd law offices)  
106 St. Mary's Avenue

Conrad Posey House, circa 1900  
(now Husick Office Building)  
Maple Avenue (moved from Kent Avenue, 1999)

Episcopal Rectory from 1904-1959, built circa 1904  
100 Oak Avenue

Christ Church, built in Port Tobacco in 1884;  
dismantled after construction of new courthouse in La Plata, with stones numbered  
and carried by oxcart to La Plata, where reconstruction was completed in 1904.  
112 Charles Street

Bank of Southern Maryland Building, 1909  
300 Charles Street

Judge Henry Robinson House, built 1906-07  
2 Oak Avenue

Bowie Ice Cream Parlor, circa 1912, now La Plata Liquors  
503 Charles Street

Matthews House, "Haldane", circa 1915  
150 Port Tobacco Road

"Nelton" (P.D. Brown House), circa 1915  
120 Port Tobacco Road

Mitchell Motor Company Building, circa 1915  
205 Charles Street

Matthews-Howard Implement Co., circa 1915; now Davis Building  
313 Charles Street

"The Maples" (Adrian Posey House), 1920  
105 Port Tobacco Road

## **4.0 DEMOGRAPHICS AND ECONOMY**

### **4.1 Population**

Population projections and patterns play an important role in the planning process for the Town government. Those projections and patterns allow the Planning Commission and Town staff to anticipate needs of citizens and allow for the scheduling for the delivery of municipal services.

#### **4.1A State and Regional Population Trends**

Between the 1990 and 2000 Census, Southern Maryland had the highest percentage of growth in Maryland.

The official population in La Plata according to the 2000 Census was 6551 persons. In 1990, the population was 5841, which indicates an increase of 12% and 710 persons. It should be noted that the Town believes that there was no undercount in the 2000 Census. In-house projections, based upon tracking of residential permits through December, 1999, placed the population at 7217.

The 2000 Census revealed other interesting characteristics of the persons who call La Plata home. The median age in 2000 was 36.5 years. This is an increase from 31 years in 1990. The percent of the population of Asian or Pacific Islander heritage was 1.6%, 0.5% was of American Indian or Eskimo heritage, 24% percent were African Americans, and 73% were Americans of European descent.

There were 2308 housing units according to the 2000 Census, 68% owner-occupied and 32% were rentals. The average size of a family consisted of 2.78 persons for an owner-occupied unit and 2.29 persons for a rental unit.

Population increases within La Plata and surrounding La Plata will place additional demands on municipal services. Additional water sources will have to be found and transportation facilities will have to be upgraded to accommodate both La Plata traffic and regional traffic.

## **4.2 Economy**

Charles County is strategically located within the Mid-Atlantic states. Almost one third of the population of the United States is located within a distance of five hundred miles or less from La Plata. In addition, La Plata is located near the Washington/Baltimore corridor, which has a population of over five million persons.

La Plata is 30 travel miles from Capitol Hill. Downtown Baltimore is 60 miles away, Alexandria, Virginia is 30 miles, and downtown Annapolis is 45 miles from La Plata. For the commuter these are long trips to work, especially at rush hour, but they are not overbearing. The military installations in the region provide significant employment and they are relatively nearby. Indian Head is 13 miles away, Patuxent River Naval Air Station is 36 miles, Dahlgren Naval Station is 19 miles and Andrews Air Force Base is 20 miles from La Plata.

Tobacco was once king in Southern Maryland. The influence of this once great agricultural industry has been greatly reduced, if not totally eliminated. Only a few jobs, based on percentage, would be considered agricultural jobs today. The majority of jobs in Charles County were retail related, service related and construction related, of the non-government jobs and excluding the self-employed. Government related employment plays a major role in Charles County, with the Naval Surface Warfare Center-Indian Head Division facility being the largest single employer within Charles County. In addition, many Charles County residents work for the Federal Government in Washington D.C.

La Plata is home to four of the top six Charles County employers. The Board of Education, Civista Health, Inc., Charles County Government and Southern Maryland Oil all are headquartered in La Plata. The other two major Charles County employers are Chaney Enterprises, located in Waldorf, and the Naval Surface Warfare Center at Indian Head.

Employment opportunities are generally good for La Plata residents. However, the Mayor and Council and the Planning Commission have long realized that such opportunities could be improved. Both bodies would like to see quality jobs in sufficient numbers in and around La Plata. These jobs would have to be of the quality that workers could afford to live in La Plata. Such employment would keep young La Plata residents in the community that they grew up in. Also, being able to work close to home, eliminating a long commute would allow workers to spend more time with their families and promote more involvement in the community. However, much will have to be done to create a significant number of additional quality jobs.

La Plata does have the infrastructure that could foster economic development. The Town owns and operates its own water and sewer utilities. Crain Highway provides a good road for truck traffic. Travel south into Virginia is especially easy. CSX maintains a rail line through La Plata which would have the potential for use, and three major airports are within about an hour's drive. Also, two fiber optic cables pass through the town.

La Plata has an untapped potential for tourism. Even though La Plata has limited historical sites within the town, it is centrally located among very important Maryland historical landmarks. St. Mary's City, Maryland's first capital, and St. Clements Island, where Maryland's first settlers landed, are within an hour's drive. The colonial port of Port Tobacco is just down the road, as is St. Ignatius Church, which is the oldest

Catholic Church in continuous use in America. The Dr. Samuel A. Mudd house is also nearby. In addition, the Town has taken ownership of the original La Plata train station. In 1999 the station was moved to a new park site on Kent Avenue to be refurbished and made into a museum. That museum is now open to the public. La Plata's proximity to these Maryland historical treasures, and to Washington D.C., Annapolis and historical points in Virginia, makes the town a logical place from which a tour could be headquartered.

## **5.0 COMMUNITY FACILITIES PLAN**

Closely related to the action steps in the above chapter is the Community Facilities Plan. One of government's chief duties is to provide for adequate public infrastructure and other public facilities. This plan addresses those duties.

### **5.1 Water and Wastewater**

To be competitive in attracting new development, as well as delivering adequate services to existing residents and businesses, the central water and wastewater systems are essential. The following recommendations are made to continue to maintain this degree of service to La Plata and its residents:

- 1) Analyze infiltration and inflow data and implement a plan of action to address this problem.
- 2) Develop a plan to provide central sewer service to Walnut Hill Road.
- 3) Upgrade the Willow Lane Pump Station.
- 4) Provide central sewer service to the Alban Tractor facility on Crain Highway.
- 5) Develop a master water and sewer distribution and collection plan.
- 6) Evaluate future water sources, especially in the light that the current aquifer serving the town is experiencing water mining where water is being withdrawn faster than it is being recharged. Surface treatment options should be developed, then implemented where appropriate.
- 7) Develop a master water and sewer distribution and collection plan for the Heritage Green project that will not only serve this new development, but also aid the remainder of the town as well.
- 8) Maintain effective communications with the Maryland Geological Survey and the Charles County Government to best monitor and manage the valuable and finite ground water resources.
- 9) Monitor water contaminant levels in the potable water source as required by Federal law and take any corrective action if needed.
- 10) Work to discourage dead-end water lines that promote stagnation of water and require an added degree of service.
- 11) Continue a program of regular testing of fire hydrants.

## **5.2 Medical Facilities and Health Care**

The following recommendation is made in an effort to enhance the quality of health care:

- 1) Support efforts by Civista Health, Inc. to upgrade their facility in order to meet the changing demands of the delivery of health care.
- 2) Support/coordinate joint programs with the Clark Senior Center and the Charles County Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

### **5.3 Public Safety**

The following recommendations are made to enhance public safety within La Plata:

- 1) Maintain the strong relationship that now exists between the La Plata Police Department, the Charles County Sheriff's Office, and the Maryland State Police.
- 2) Set standards for required fire flow, fire hydrant location and other fire protection requirements that will support or enhance the Town's ISO rating.
- 3) Continue a system of regular maintenance of the Town's fire hydrants and water infrastructure.
- 4) Create an auxiliary water supply point for fire department use at the lake on Redwood Circle for emergency supply in case of problems with the water system.

#### **5.4 Community Development**

To enhance La Plata's quality of life and sense of identity, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) Work with the Charles County Historical Society to maximize the appeal of the new museum at the relocated train station.
- 2) Continue an active calendar of community events for both the entertainment of La Plata citizens and to enhance community spirit.
- 3) Work with County and Regional Tourism agencies to market/promote La Plata.

## **5.5 General Government**

In an effort to keep pace with the current and planned rapid growth patterns and improve overall efficiency of daily governmental operations, the following recommendations are suggested:

- 1) Evaluate space needs for the potential expansion of the La Plata Police Department.
- 2) Maintain a strong presence with the Economic Development Commission, the Chamber of Commerce, The Tri County Council of Southern Maryland and other bodies which are involved with the promotion of the Southern Maryland region.
- 3) Build a central stormwater management facility in the southwest quadrant of the town to allow for more efficient use of commercial property.